

Customer Service

A publication of Saint Paul Regional Water Services

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Understanding your water bill

Many charges are for local city services

Your bills from SPRWS contain a great deal of information about your account, and from some inquiries we have received from our customers, we believe that there is some confusion about the source and nature of some of the charges that appear on your bills.

For most of our customers, the bills will indicate how much water they use and how much that water will cost. In addition, though, we have agreements with several of the cities we serve to bill for other services provided to you by those cities, such as storm or sanitary sewer and recycling, as well as some other miscellaneous charges, as determined by the individual cities.

Consolidating several charges on one bill saves your city many of the costs associated with billing—such as the printing, production, and mailing of separate bills. SPRWS remits the money collected for these charges to the individual cities, retaining only the payments for water consumption and a fee for providing the billing services.

For instance, in Saint Paul, customers pay a sewer rate based on actual water usage. That money goes to Saint Paul Public Works and the Metropolitan Council.

In Falcon Heights, the city charges residential customers a flat rate for sewer, while commercial accounts pay per unit of water consumed. Falcon Heights also charges storm sewer fees, a recycling fee, and a hydrant fee.

In Lauderdale, the city sets a flat residential sewer rate and a per-unit cost for commercial consumption. They also charge a 5 percent storm sewer fee.

Maplewood adds a sanitary sewer fee, an environmental fee (storm sewer management), and a recycling fee to their bills.

In West Saint Paul, the city adds a flat sewer charge to bills for residential service and a sewer charge based on water consumption for commercial customers.

Example of charges for a Saint Paul residential customer

TOTAL WATER	\$28.22
Saint Paul Sanitary Sewer (50%) Metro Council Environmental (50%) TOTAL SEWER	\$19.65 <u>\$19.65</u> \$39.30
MISCELLANEOUS CHARGES Safe Drinking Water Act Fee TOTAL MISCELLANEOUS	<u>\$5.21</u> \$5.21
TOTAL AMOUNT DUE	\$72.73

This is a typical charges section of a Saint Paul residential bill for a family using 17 units of water. The charges are grouped together. The water charge for actual water used is listed first; that money comes to the utility. Then the sewer charge appears, which is split between the Saint Paul Public Works department and the Metropolitan Council. During the October -December billing period, all users pay a one-time annual testing charge of \$5.21, required by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and submitted to the Minnesota Department of Health. All of these charges combined equal the total quarterly bill for a residential customer.

In Lilydale, Mendota Heights, Mendota, Roseville, South Saint Paul, and Sunfish Lake, the bill is solely for water usage.

The utility also collects an annual testing charge of \$5.21 from all of our customers, which goes to the Minnesota Department of Health to pay for water testing required by the Federal Safe Drinking

If you have questions about the status of your account, the water consumption shown on your bill, or how the amount of your bill is determined, by all means call the SPRWS Customer Service office at 651-266-6350. However, the other charges discussed above are set by the city in which you live, and if you have any questions about how those fees are set and how the revenue is used, please call your city of residence at the telephone number listed on the back of your bill.

To Serve You Better

Saint Paul Regional Water Services offers several payment options. If you need help to decide which method is best for you, just give us a call. A Customer Service Representative will be happy to discuss each option in detail.

Direct payment plan. Never write another check for your water services, and never again worry about paying your bill on time. Join nearly 10,000 other SPRWS customers and have the amount due deducted electronically from your checking or savings account. You'll still receive a statement, but it will indicate which date each payment will be deducted from your account.

Monthly Manager Plan. This is an excellent tool for budgeting your monthly expenses. The utility calculates a fixed monthly payment based on your average water usage for the past 12 months. The fixed payment is deducted electronically each month from the account you designate. Every three months you'll receive a report showing your actual consumption, and once a year a "clean-up" statement will be calculated to reconcile your account. Available to quarterly customers only; there is no charge for this service.

Drop boxes. For next-day processing, use the McCarrons Campus drop box, located at 1900 Rice Street (open 24 hours). For 48-hour processing, the downtown drop box is located at Saint Paul City Hall, 15 Kellogg Blvd. (8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; visitors must pass through security.) Checks or money orders only, please.

In-person transactions. To pay your bills in person, walk into the **McCarrons Campus office**, 1900 Rice Street, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. We accept checks, money orders, cash, and can make credit arrangements.

Questions? Call Customer Service at 651-266-6350.

Protect your house from frozen water meters and pipes

Every winter hundreds of water meters and pipes freeze in area homes. You can take steps to prevent the damage, expense, and inconvenience associated with freezing pipes and meters, many of them relatively easy and inexpensive. Keep in mind that while the utility owns the meter itself, along with the couplings on either side of it, it is the responsibility of the homeowner to protect the meter from damage. If we need to replace a damaged meter, including damage caused by freezing, the homeowner will be charged for the meter.

Water meters sit several inches off the floor in the basements of most homes. Particularly in Saint Paul, many basements are partially finished and not used for main living quarters, so you might not notice colder temperatures or frosted areas along walls. But you can take several actions to prevent meters and pipes from freezing in your home.

Keep in mind that temperatures are colder along the floor and the cement block wall of the basement than they are near the ceiling. Circulating the warmer air can help prevent frozen meters.

In some homes, meters are in separate, unheated rooms; keep the doors to that room open.

Through remodeling, meters may have been boxed in with gypsum board. Add vents to allow warmer air to the meter. When remodeling, install vents or louvered cabinet doors, or other methods of allowing air to circulate around the meter. Keep in mind that, for a number of reasons, meters may need to be repaired or replaced, in which case access to the meter will be required.

If the meter is in a pit in your home, make sure that the cover fits properly and has no cracks through which cold air can enter. The pipes, valves, and water meter in the pit should not touch the concrete walls, where it is colder. In addition:

- Keep your basement warm enough to keep the meter and pipes from freezing
- Check along the foundation for places cold wind can waft into the basement or into crawl spaces and plug them with insulation.
- Close off crawl space vents and doors
- Replace or repair broken or cracked basements windows
- Install storm windows or cover basement windows with weather insulation kits

Don't forget your outdoor faucets!

To prevent the outside faucet from freezing, turn off the water connection at a valve inside the house and drain the exposed pipe before temperatures drop.

- Make sure that basement doors and windows close tightly
 - Seal or caulk cracks in the wall
 - Insulate pipes

Make sure the valves on either side of the water meter work and can be turned off if the meter freezes or the pipe bursts.

If the pipes near the meter are frozen, use a hair dryer to slowly apply heat to the pipe.

If your water meter freezes, the bottom plate will crack. Do not try to repair the meter yourself, just call us.

If you suspect damaged or frozen water pipes or water meter, call the SPRWS 24-hour dispatch office at 651-266-6868.